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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of teaching as a gendered profession in Finland, focusing on recent research on teachers and their professional development. Currently, women are better educated than men in Finland, but they still do not achieve employment positions and salaries equal to those of men. Though there tend to be more female than male teachers, most principals and professors are male. This researcher examined preservice teachers' and adult education teachers' biographies and professional socialization from a feminist point of view, noting the importance of using the life history approach to studying teachers. The study explored student teachers' identity making process during the one-year secondary teacher education program at Tampere University, comparing school teachers and adult education teachers and the ways in which their career paths and construction of personal and professional identities differed. Data were collected via life history interviews, student journals, portfolios, in-class assignments, and home assignments. (Contains 46 references.) (SM)

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Marjo Vuorikoski

April 2001

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Constructing Personal and Professional Identity During Teacher Education

In the 1990s, and especially during the past few years there have been more and more studies available that provide us a more vivid and complex picture of teachers and their teaching by means of life-history research techniques. Although many of these studies deal with teachers' professional development they don't usually take into account the role of teacher education. My research project aims to provide a better understanding of the impact of teacher education on teachers' identity formation.

I'm especially interested in student teachers' expectations and experiences about becoming a teacher and the ways in which they construct their personal and professional identities. The focus of the study is not on the structures, procedures, and regulations that govern the process of teacher education, but rather on the lived experience of persons who are learning to teach. The aim is to understand afresh the teacher who is becoming a professional (or improving his or her teacher qualifications).

However, constructing identity and integrity in teaching occurs within a dynamically changing socio-cultural context. Furthermore, teacher education is a contested field that takes place in between the highly politicized setting of higher education and the bureaucratized organizational context of schools and other educational institutions. That is why I'm also interested in the relationship between the individuals and the context. It is also a question about the relationship between structures and agency. Both the society as a whole and educational institutions shape the identities of student teachers, but also these students themselves with their various backgrounds and life-histories are subjects in constructing what kinds of persons and teachers they will become.

It's common to speak about teachers without paying attention to their gender. As a matter of fact, teaching is a gendered profession. I find it important to focus on gender and study teachers from a feminist perspective. In my study I see the informants not only as student teachers but also as females and males, who have decided to become teachers. It is essential to take into account the informants' gender when interpreting their life-stories. I need to listen to them closely in order to understand

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their paths to teaching and the ways in which they see teaching as a profession and themselves with their own characteristics and abilities.

This paper is threefold in purpose. First, my aim is to provide a brief overview of teaching as a gendered profession. Second, I focus on recent research on teachers and their professional development. Third, I introduce my research project and some of its theoretical background.

Teaching as a gendered profession

At present women are in average better educated than men in Finland. There are more women graduating from high-schools than men (high-school is not compulsory in Finland). Men have still more often vocational education than women, but younger women (25-49 years) have already left men behind in that respect. The number of women at universities has been increasing since the 1960's and nowadays their share is more than a half. Also in adult education women are very active participants (53 per cent in 1995), especially middle aged and well educated women. (Statistics Finland, 1998)

Despite the fact that women are better educated, they don't usually achieve as high positions as men in working life. Their salaries are lower than men's (they are about 80 percent of men's salaries). However, there are a lot of discussions whether we should be worried about boys, because they don't seem to enjoy going to school. Some argue that schools and other educational institutions favor girls and women, who do so well because they "are nice, obedient and hard working".

It is common to speak about teachers without paying attention to their gender despite the fact that most teachers from day care to adult education are female. During the past few years there have been vivid discussions about the need for more male teachers. Actually, this discussion has surfaced the fact that the gender matters in teaching.

A very common argument in the discussion has been that a male model and a father figure is needed in school. It has also been stated that some of the disciplinary problems would be easier to solve, if there were also male teachers around. This discussion for more male teachers was lively in the late 1980s when male quotas were abolished from the entrance criteria to primary teacher education. The reason for the abolition was the enactment of the law of equal opportunities (1987). In the mid-1990s Olli-Pekka Heinonen, at that time the Minister of Education, reopened the discussion on gender and teaching. He was an active participant in the discussion and he even coedited a book "Miehiä kouluun?" (Men to school?, Heinonen & Mikkola, 1997), in which the starting point was that more men are needed in schools.

A Finnish group of researchers (Lahelma et al., 2000) has also analyzed this discussion and teachers' perceptions on the issue. It seems that the need for more men is often taken for granted by teachers themselves, although many of them address this discussion critically. Some teachers argue that male teachers raise the status of the profession or improve the atmosphere in staff rooms. According to the researchers the arguments in this discussion are often inconsistent and based on taken-for-granted notions of complementarity built into the prevailing conceptions of gender.

Arguing for the need for more males in schools is not new, and not solely Finnish. Often it is combined with worries about boys' problems in school. This discussion has been analyzed and questioned through research conducted by feminist researchers. Concern over the disastrous consequences following from a predominance of women in teaching has often been expressed in England (see Acker, 1994). Similar worries have also been expressed in the Nordic countries (e.g. Reisby, 1998; Gannerud, 1999).

In a historical perspective, when teaching has been thought of a female profession it has not necessarily been the percentage of male and female teachers in focus but, rather, it has been "women as teachers" more than "teachers as women", as Ben-Peretz (1996) has put it.

As long as we have had a public school system in Finland, teaching has been a profession for both men and women. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries men accounted for approximately 50 per cent of all primary school teachers. In the early 1920s the proportion of female teachers began to increase and in 1955 more than two thirds of teachers in elementary and lower secondary schools were female (Rinne, 1986). In 1995 the situation was pretty much the same; almost 70 per cent of class teachers in primary schools (years 1-6) were female. The proportion of female subject teachers (who teach mainly 12-16 year old students in the lower secondary school) depends on the subject, but has been around two thirds in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the proportion of female head teachers was less than one-third in 1995. (Statistics Finland, 1998; Lahelma et al., 2000)

In many Western countries the proportion of males among primary school teachers is lower than in Finland, but among secondary school teachers it is higher. For example, Acker (1994) has presented statistics for England and Wales in 1990 showing that women constituted about 80 per cent of primary school teachers, but only 48 per cent of secondary teachers. The percentage of females amongst head teachers exceeds 50 per cent only in Scotland, where the proportion of female teachers reaches 90 per cent. The proportion of female head teachers is particularly low in the member states with the lowest female majority among teachers: Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland (European Commission 1996, 100 ff).

It has been very difficult to find any detailed figures on adult education teachers and their gender division. This is partly because so many of them work only as part-time teachers. But the majority of the adult education teachers are female, and in popular adult education where almost two thirds of the students are women (Statistics Finland, 1998), also the vast majority of teachers are female.

Unlike some other countries, primary teacher education programs is a popular field for young students in Finland, and difficult to get into. In 1997, 23 per cent of applicants were male, and 12 per cent of all applicants were accepted (Statistics Finland, 1997). The teacher education programs for subject teachers are usually one-year programs and they give pedagogical qualifications to teach both in schools and adult education. The proportion of female applicants and students teachers in these programs depends on the subject, but on the whole the majority are female.

The argument that teaching is becoming more and more a female occupation even in Finland does get some support from the statistics. But we still have both male and female teachers, and the majority of schools are directed by male head teachers. Also the great majority of professorships in education are held by men. It means that the 'gate-keeping' of the teaching profession is still widely and firmly in the hands of men.

Research on teachers

There is a huge amount of studies done on teachers in various countries. Educational research studies on teacher socialization and teacher education operate at different levels. Some studies are more highly focused on the macro-structures of schooling, whereas others concentrate more upon the particularity of experiences in education. Similarly, the epistemological and methodological standpoints of researchers are varied.

Studying teachers' professional development has interested researchers. As a result of this interest there are several models of the teacher's career paths that include several developmental stages. Perhaps the best-known of these models have been produced by Pickle (1985) and Huberman (1992). In Finland we also have several researchers e.g. Kohonen (1993), Niemi (1995) and Järvinen (1999) who have created their versions of this stage-model. There are also studies of expertise in pedagogy that have shed light how the development process from a beginner to a expert teacher takes place.

Since the 1980s, and especially during the past few years there are more and more studies available that provide a more vivid and complex picture of teachers and their career paths. Postmodern theories rejected grand narratives and researchers have turned their attention toward to individuals willing to listen to their personal experiences. Especially, in the 1990s

researchers have applied life-history method to their teacher studies both in Finland (e.g. Syrjälä, 1996; Kauppila & Tuomainen, 1996; Silkelä, 1999) and internationally (e.g. Goodson, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Grimmett, 1994; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). However, the thing that seems to be missing from these studies is gender. Even Bullough, who followed one female teacher's career and experiences during ten years and reported about it in several stages, did not pay almost any attention to his informant's gender (see Bullough, 1989 and 1993; Bullough & Baughman, 1997). Obviously, it was so natural that a teacher is a woman that he did not need to take the gender into account. However, his research manages to portray some of the complexity of teaching and challenges beliefs about teacher development. It criticizes teacher education programs that have a simplistic view of teacher development.

But there are feminist writers who focus on gender when studying teachers' lives. For instance, Sue Middleton's (1993) work on teachers, in which she applied life-history method, provides vital insights into teaching as a gendered profession. Middleton argues that "writing one's autobiography becomes, in this framework, in part a process of deconstructing the discursive practices through which one's subjectivity has been constituted". In addition, there are several other studies on teachers done in feminist poststructuralist frameworks.

Middleton's (1993) study, which deals with becoming a feminist teacher, includes life histories of feminist teachers including her own story. The study focuses on the historical and biographical circumstances in which the women came to work in education and the processes by which they began to identify themselves as feminists. These life histories show that the contradictions evident within the educational policy of the time became the basis of regulatory practices in schools that materially shaped the everyday realities of girl students, constituting them as raced, classed, and gendered subjects.

Kathleen Weiler's (1988) study deals with the achievements of feminist teachers and the obstacles facing them in schools. Weiler develops a critical theory of schooling from feminist perspective. The theoretical analysis raises the question of the connection between schools and class interests, patriarchy, and the race. It attempts to locate individual struggle and action in relation to larger economic and social forces. The study also explores the beliefs and practices of teachers as they attempt to create what Weiler has called a feminist counter-hegemony.

Also Petra Munro (1998) weaves her own intellectual history into her study in which she wanted to throw light in the process of women teachers' construction of subjectivity in the past decades. She wanted to collect stories from women who had started teaching in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, since little historical information is available from these time periods. Her analysis ranges far beyond the specifics of these teachers' life stories. Central to her study is a concern with cultural representations of

the woman school teacher. But equally central is a focus on the construction of subjectivity more broadly and on the possible meanings of resistance and agency. As she puts the goal of the book: "The three life histories of women teachers represented here are an attempt to understand how women negotiate a self within and against cultural norms and expectations in which women are either absent or represented as the objects of knowledge, rarely as subjects."

Despite the fact that there are a great number of researchers studying teachers and teacher education also in Finland, barely any of them do feminist research. Elina Lahelma (1997) has an ongoing research project 'Teachers as citizens and as educators of citizens' which focuses on gender. Vappu Sunnari (1996) has studied primary teacher education from gender perspective. However, we have feminist researchers (e.g. Lahelma & Gordon, 1997; Gordon & Holland & Lahelma, 2000; Lindroos, 1997) who have managed to reveal gendered practices in everyday life in schools through applying ethnographic method in their studies. So far feminist researchers have left adult education teachers almost 'untouched' in Finland.

Also internationally there are not that many feminist studies that focus on teacher education. Erica McWilliam (1994) is one of those few feminist researchers who focuses on teacher education in her longitudinal study in which she describes the professional socialization of a group of undergraduate students. She says she does that "in ways different from the idealism-to-realism story that has become a truism of teacher education literature". McWilliam, who is a teacher educator herself, applies her new postmodern feminist theoretical approach. This research also has an action research type of an approach, because this study is also a part of a pedagogical process ("research as pedagogy"). In this narrative research McWilliam focuses on the language that pre-service teachers use, and especially in what ways the vocabularies change over the period of pre-service preparation.

In my research project I'll focus on examining pre-service teachers' and adult education teachers' biographies and professional socialization from feminist point of view. According to Munro (1998) life histories are especially suitable for illuminating several aspects of gender relations including: the construction of the gendered self-identity, the relationship between the individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms, and the dynamics of power relations between men and women.

'Masculine science' as the basis of teaching

The struggle of teachers for professional recognition and for the associated working conditions and rewards that might bring it has a long and chequered history. More pay, higher status, greater autonomy, increased

self-regulation and improved standards of training - these themes have underscored the individual and collective struggles of teachers for many decades. (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). Professionalism has been a dominant strategy of numerous occupations, and also of those female professions functioning in the welfare state services such as nursing and social work.

The importance of scientific knowledge and education have been emphasized in the development of professions. Professionals' demands for autonomy and material rewards are based on their claimed expertise acquired through long formal education (Labaree, 1992). However, this conventional assumption that professional practice would be based on scientific knowledge, has been criticized especially in recent years (e.g. Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). Yet professionalism is a two-edged sword, bearing potential not only for producing better services for clients but also for increased rigidity and monopolistic patterns of services.

But can emphasizing scientific education and scientific knowledge as a basis of teaching also do harm for teachers and their students? I find it at least possible. A science of teaching based on classifications of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and so on, privileges knowledge and cognition above care as the foundation of teaching. Care as well as the cognition should be at the heart of the teaching profession and for many teachers it is so. Scientific knowledge base for teaching ignores almost everything that is specifically moral, emotional and contextual about teaching.

The appreciation of scientific knowledge so highly as the basis of professional practices also in the female professions of teaching, caring and social work, underestimates female characteristics that are very basic in these fields where the main content of work is to be in the relationship with people. Those characteristics related to women, such as subjectivity, intuition, and emotion, are ignored, they are held inferior to those masculine traits, such as reason and objectivity in our western society where science is our new religion.

However, this common belief in the value-neutrality of science has been challenged by several feminist writers (e.g. Harding, 1991; Longino, 1990; Tuana, 1992). Feminist scholars have focused attention onto the dynamics of gender and oppression in the theories and methods of science. Their works are continually uncovering sexist gender ideology in specific research programs in different fields of study. They have also raised questions about objectivity, about rationality, about the possibility of value-free science, and about the ways in which beliefs and knowledge are related to social experience.

The solution for Jane Roland Martin (1994) in the field of education is the reconstruction of our educational systems. She states that "the general problem to be solved is that of uniting thought and action, reason and

emotion, self and other. This was the problem Dewey addressed, but his failure to understand the workings of gender made it impossible for him to solve it. The general problem to be solved here is that of giving the reproductive processes of society - and the females who have traditionally been assigned responsibility for carrying them on - their due. Only then will feeling and emotion, intimacy and connection be perceived as valuable qualities so that a journey of integration is possible."

Many feminist writers have addressed one very basic issue in teaching: the emotions of teaching. This articulates the caring orientation which many women teachers in particular take towards their work, in a profession where women are numerically but not politically dominant. This caring orientation has been explored in terms of teachers' relationships with students (see e.g., Noddings 1992), parents (Henry, 1996), and each other (Ben-Peretz, 1996). Feminist writers point to how essential caring is to good quality teaching and learning, yet how ignored and marginalized it is in the politics of educational reform and administration. Even among these writers, however, only a few acknowledge that in contexts of an over-rationalized reform agenda which is unsympathetic to the needs of teachers, this caring orientation can also turn against teachers as they sacrifice themselves emotionally to the needs of those around them, in policy conditions which make caring more and more difficult (see Acker 1994; Blackmore, 1996).

However, currently there are also some male educational theorists who stress caring and emotions in teaching. Andy Hargreaves (1998) emphasizes the fact that emotions are at the heart of teaching. On the basis of his study, in which he focuses on the relationships that teachers have with their students, Hargreaves argues that teaching cannot be reduced to technical competence or clinical standards. Instead, good teaching is charged with positive emotion. It is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being efficient, having correct competencies, or learning all the right techniques. Also according to Robert Fried (1995) teaching is a passionate vocation. Good teachers, he says, are passionate about ideas, learning and their relationships with students.

Hargreaves (1998) argues that the discourse of educational reform must acknowledge and even honor the centrality of the emotions to the processes and outcomes of teaching and learning. Likewise, he demands that policy makers, administrators and other reformers must incorporate the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning into learning standards or curriculum targets for students, and into professional standards or competencies for teachers and administrators.

Yet understanding what shapes the emotional lives and work of many teachers calls for a more sociologically and politically informed perspective than most of the literature on teaching and teacher development has so far been able to offer. We need to study teachers' lives and everyday work in

order to be able to meet teachers' educational needs and develop teacher education.

Why life-history approach

Studying teachers' lives will provide a valuable range of insights into the new moves to restructure and reform schooling, into new policy concerns and directives. Another rationale is to give new light to teacher socialization and help to develop teacher education better meet the needs of teachers whose work is going through deep changes.

Biography is increasingly believed to have a significant bearing on the classroom behaviors and practices of teachers. Biographical studies on pre-service teachers point out that pre-service and beginning teachers' thinking about teaching and their classroom practice is partially shaped by their prior experiences (see Knowles, 1992). Student teachers, and subsequently beginning teachers, do not enter teacher education programs like empty vessels waiting to be filled with the skills, aptitudes and experiences appropriate for a first year teacher. Rather, they have been subjected to a life-time of 'teacher education'. Teacher socialization occurs through the observation and internalization of particular models of teaching as experienced by the recipient pupil.

In one sense the project of studying teachers' lives is an attempt to generate a counter-culture. As Goodson (1992) puts it, "it will resist the tendency to 'return teachers to the shadows': a counterculture based upon a research mode that above all takes teachers seriously, and seeks to listen to 'the teacher's voice'." The sponsoring of this kind of teacher's voice is thus counter-cultural in that it works against the grain of power/knowledge as held and produced by politicians and administrators.

In altering our viewpoint in this way and starting to listen to teachers themselves we may capture different representative voices with which to address questions of educational policy and teacher education. It is surely time that we begin to see the world from their viewpoint. Simultaneously, when we start listening to practitioners' voices, we'll listen to women's voices instead of men on the top of the hierarchy in education.

Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) emphasize the great virtue of studies of everyday life and life history, because they hold the relationship between what could be called private troubles and public issues. For it is in the details of the everyday working lives of teachers as professionals that we shall see how the rhetoric actually plays out. When we look at teaching as lived experience and work, we often find that seductive rhetorics of change pronounced in policy break down into cynical, contradictory or resistant voices within the lives of teachers themselves. Furthermore, what passes for professionalism and professionalization is very different in the experienced lives and work of teachers, than in the official discourses of

policy and change which exhalt and advocate it. As a matter of fact, in looking at the interface between the personal craft knowledge of the teacher and professionalization projects, we may find teaching practices and teachers' knowledge to be actually antithetical to wider professionalization projects. Hence, we may be witnessing the sponsorship of deprofessionalizing professionalism (see Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996).

My research project

At the moment I explore student teachers' identity-making process during the one-year secondary teacher education program at Tampere University. In addition, I have started to collect data together with my colleague from adult education teachers who participate in the one-year study program in which they have a chance to improve their practical and formal teacher qualifications. This program (in which I also work as an educator) is also organized by the University of Tampere.

The aim is also to compare school teachers and adult education teachers and the ways in which their career paths and construction of personal and professional identities differ from each other. The research questions are:

- How and when did they decide to become teachers?
- How did they end up coming to teacher education program?
- How do they see teaching as a profession and what are their expectations from that work?
- What are their characteristics and abilities that make them think that they would be good teachers? What are their goals as teachers?
- Do they see learning and teaching as gendered processes?
- What kinds of school memories do they have about being a female/male at school and in later learning environments ?
- How do their own experiences related to gender possibly affect their own teaching?

I have several ways to collect the data: life-history interviews, students' journals, portfolios, in-class assignments and home assignments. I conduct life-history interviews with student teachers in three phases of their studies; at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the program.

The crucial focus for life-history work is to locate student teachers' own life stories alongside a broader contextual analysis (see Goodson, 1992). The life-history is the life story located within it's historical context. This larger context of my study includes history of Finnish educational policy, reforms of education system and teacher education system. I also emphasize the importance of understanding the policy contexts in which agendas of teachers' professionalism have arisen. Therefore I need to investigate the social histories and social geographies of teacher professionalism and professionalization in sensitively contextualized ways.

In addition, the life-history approach has had other meanings to my own life. I have started to write my own life-story. I have wanted to understand my own situation as a teacher, as a researcher and as a feminist. Like some other feminist writers (e.g. Middleton, 1993; Munro, 1998), I need to make visible the positionality or situatedness of my analysis. Here I relate to Sue Middleton (1993, p.6-7), "I bring into focus the environment in which my sociological and educational activities are carried out. My everyday life in a sexist society - my life as a woman, an academic, a mother, and a citizen - is studied as sociologically relevant in that it is generative of my pedagogy."

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